

JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM
IDENTIFICATION FORM

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~~CIA SPECIAL COLLECTIONS~~
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CSI-0337/96
12 August 1996

MEMORANDUM FOR: Executive Director

FROM: John F. Pereira
Acting Director, Center for the
Study of Intelligence

SUBJECT: CIA Testimony at JFK Assassination
Board Hearing

1. This memorandum is for your information. On 6 August 1996, the JFK Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB) held an open hearing for purposes of having public discussion about declassification of CIA's files related to the assassination.
2. The principal issue discussed at the hearing was whether the Board needs to review word-by-word each of the more than 300,000 pages of CIA's "sequestered collection". This collection is comprised of those records that were made available to the House Select Committee on Assassinations during its investigation.
3. The Board's General Counsel, Jeremy Gunn, proposed that the ARRB consider declaring a sizeable portion of the collection as not relevant or duplicative. If the Board agrees, then the irrelevant and duplicative materials would be examined only by the ARRB'S staff, thereby speeding up the review process substantially. (The Board's charter expires in October, 1997, but presumably could be extended by Congress.)
4. Two members of the Historical Review Group--Barry Harrelson and I--testified under oath on the Agency's considerable efforts to fulfill its commitment to release as many assassination documents to the public as possible. In a prepared statement, we described how the sequestered collection was compiled originally, kept intact per instructions from Congress, and then reviewed for release under authority granted by then Speaker of the House Foley. We emphasized that every document in the collection is available in full to the Board and its senior staff.

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SUBJECT: CIA Testimony at JFK Assassination
Board Hearing

5. From CIA's perspective, the hearing went smoothly. The Board accepted CIA's testimony without criticism. None of the four public witnesses raised any serious concerns about CIA's handling of the JFK documents. One witness--author/lawyer Harrison Livingstone--claimed that there has been too much focus on CIA records, and that CIA was being made the "whipping boy".

John F. Pereira
John F. Pereira

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SUBJECT: CIA Testimony at JFK Assassination
Board Meeting

AD/DCI/CSI/JFPereira:bas/x30373 (12 Aug 96)

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TESTIMONY BEFORE JFK BOARD, 6 AUGUST 1996

INTRODUCTION

Introduce CIA participants

We are pleased to provide information to the Assassination Records Review Board that might assist the Board in fulfilling its responsibilities under the President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act. CIA is committed to full cooperation with the Board.

Before addressing the subject of the sequestered collection directly, I would like to provide some background to help put the sequestered collection into some sort of context.

In the spring of 1992, prior to the enactment of the JFK Assassination Records Act, then Director of Central Intelligence, Bob Gates issued instructions to begin reviewing for declassification all records related to the assassination.

The CIA History Staff was charged with identifying the relevant records. Once this was done, the Historical Review Group took custody of these records and immediately began reviewing them for declassification for release to the National Archives.

Once the Kennedy Assassination Records Act was passed, our goal became to release as many of the records as possible by the 22 August 1993 deadline established by the Act. Approximately 125,000 pages were transferred to the National Archives by that date.

With subsequent releases, CIA has now declassified and transferred some 227,000 pages of material to the National Archives. Based on discussions with the Board, we are continuing to release additional information that had been redacted earlier.

The remaining records are in various stages of review. Some require review by other agencies. Some is congressional material. Final decisions on other records are awaiting discussion with the Review Board.

THE ASSASSINATION RECORDS

In identifying relevant records, we have followed the definitions in the 1992 Act and the related rules which were published in the Federal Register.

The Kennedy assassination records in CIA consist of two major groups of files. One group consists of the documents in the Lee Harvey Oswald file--sometimes referred to as the "Oswald 201 file". These consist mainly of documents collected after the assassination and during the Warren Commission investigation.

There are about 26,000 pages of material in the Oswald file. All but a handful have been declassified and sent to the National Archives.

The second group is comprised of the "sequestered collection". These are the records that were made available to the House Select Committee on Assassinations, and which the Committee asked CIA to hold in safekeeping upon the completion of the Committee's investigation.

Certain additional records, including 400 excerpts from minutes of the Director's morning meetings, and some working files, have been added to the overall collection since 1992.

SEQUESTERED COLLECTION

First of all, every document in the sequestered collection is available to the Board for review. The documents are available in full, without redactions.

The record shows that the sequestered collection consists of documents compiled in connection with the investigation of the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA).

A portion of the documents were created specifically in response to requests from the HSCA. Other records were already in existence prior to the creation of the Committee. Still other documents were created by the Committee itself. For example, notes of interviews conducted by the Committee's staff.

Within the sequestered collection there are two major categories of records. One category consists of approximately 129,000 pages of hard copy. The second category consists of 72 reels of microfilm, or the equivalent of 163,000 pages of hard copy.

The reason why the documents were sequestered is explained in a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Chairman Louis Stokes of the HSCA and DCI Stansfield Turner in August 1977. The Memorandum provides as follows:

"Upon termination of the Committee, all materials provided by CIA and examined by the Committee will be kept and preserved within a segregated and secure area within CIA for at least 30 years unless the DCI and the House of Representatives agree to a shorter period of time."

In April 1979, Robert Blakey, Chief Counsel and Staff Director of the HSCA visited CIA Headquarters to complete the process of designating what materials were to be sequestered. All the documents made available to the Committee were included in the sequestered collection.

REVIEW AND DECLASSIFICATION OF THE SEQUESTERED FILES

In 1992, CIA wrote to Speaker of the House Thomas Foley requesting approval to begin declassifying and releasing the records. In October of that year, Mr. Foley wrote a letter to the DCI granting CIA the authority to do so. The Speaker's decision was made in anticipation of passage of the Assassination Records Collection Act.

THE HARDCOPY MATERIAL

The hardcopy part of the sequestered collection includes copies of most of the CIA documents in the Oswald 201 file. Also included are 201 files, personnel files, and security files on persons who are mentioned in documents relevant to the assassination, or who figure in one of the conspiracy theories.

The collection also includes about 30,000 pages of documents, memos, and notes (many handwritten) that were created by the Committee staff during their investigation.

THE MICROFILM PORTION OF THE SEQUESTERED COLLECTION

As I noted earlier, there are approximately 72 reels of microfilm in the sequestered collection. (Incidentally, we have arranged to have all of the microfilm records printed in hard copy.)

The decision to microfilm a portion of the sequestered collection was apparently based on two major considerations:

First, the integrity of the sequestered records had to be maintained.

Second, a number of the files requested by the HSCA were active and had to be available to allow people to continue conducting their normal activities.

The solution was to replace certain records with microfilm versions. These records were microfilmed during 1979-80 with the approval of the Assassinations Committee.

THE CONTENT OF THE MICROFILM

A sizeable portion of the microfilm--approximately 50 percent--duplicates the hard copy files. For example, there are 12 reels of material from the Oswald 201 file.

The bulk of the reels consists of files on individuals and organizations, including personnel files of CIA employees. There are also a number of files on anti-Castro organizations. All but a small percentage of the materials are CIA-originated cables, dispatches, memoranda, reports, and correspondence.

There are questions of privacy that we believe the Board may want to consider in determining what information is to be released to the public. Some of the records contain, for example, medical information on an individual.

There are also questions of relevancy that we suggest the Board consider. For example, many of the documents cover sensitive activities that go far beyond the timeframe of the assassination or investigations into the assassination.

SUMMARY

--We hope that the Board has found this discussion of the sequestered documents useful.

--We look forward to continuing cooperation with the Board as we all work towards releasing as much information as possible to the American public.